Canon and Censorship in the Islamic Intellectual and Theological History

Call for papers – International Conference and Collective Volume

Muslim cultures and societies as well as Muslim theologies did not witness the emergence of a single institution that determines normative positions and establishes a binding canon for everyone who adheres to Islam. Instead, the constitutional texts and positions for schools of law and theology, for Sufi brotherhoods and ḥadīth-scholars and others were – and still are – (re)negotiated constantly in a scholarly discourse over certain periods of time. Besides very few 'canonical' texts that find acceptance among a large majority of Muslims – one might only be able to name the Qurʾān and a consensual body of Prophetic traditions – most of the texts, ideas and individuals that gained authority were accepted by only certain groups, communities or schools. This fact makes the study of canon and censorship in the Islamic Intellectual and Theological History particularly important.

Recent scholarship on canon and censorship especially emphasize the fact that a community of people usually attribute authority and importance to certain texts, ideas and individuals. The constitutive and normative character of what can be called a canonical text, idea or person therefore is only constructed and valid for a specific (scholarly) community and group. By defining their group identity through constitutive ideas and texts, they also draw 'intellectual' boundaries for their members in order to determine belonging or exclusion on a social dimension. Ideas and texts that contradict the group's constitutional ideas are marked as wrong, false, or heterodox and therefore are perceived as a danger to the group. Hence, certain control mechanisms are employed which can be seen as means of censorship.

This observation has several crucial consequences that influence the way of how Islamic Intellectual History can be approached. First, since the canonical status of a certain text e.g. is attributed by a community, it can also be concluded that the processes of canonization and censorship are most likely influenced by other factors as well. This means, that factors like political patronage, historical events, the availability and circulation of manuscripts and maybe even the charisma of certain individuals can have a strong impact on what texts and ideas were perceived as canonical or authoritative.

Second, a perspective that focuses on the relation between community and canon highlights the aspect of plurality in Islamic Intellectual history. Since proclaimed canons are binding for the members of the group that supports them, various claims of authority among the different communities need to be perceived as parallel. One canon should not have a predominance over the others.

Third, this perspective questions the wide-spread periodization of the Intellectual History into a so called 'classical' and 'post-classical' period. Similarly, concepts of a 'formative period,' 'classical Islam' or 'Islamic tradition' need to be reevaluated. Since canonization and censorship appear throughout history and depend on specific historical, social and intellectual constellations, one can hardly argue in favor for one period, one region or

even one school to represent 'the standard' for 'the Islam.' It is much more convincing to speak of different developments of canonization and receptions of texts, ideas and authoritative figures than of 'classics' e.g.

The conference welcomes papers that focuses on certain texts, ideas or individuals that were perceived by Muslim communities as canon, authorities, or constitutional ideas and texts. In order to reach broad conclusions from the various papers, we encourage case studies that cover a wide range of disciplines (Sufism, Islamic law, Islamic theology, Islamic Philosophy, ḥadīth-studies etc.) as well as focus on texts, ideas and individuals from different regions and time periods ranging from early Islamic history to modern times. It is particularly important to highlight the plurality of Islamic intellectual and theological thought by focusing on different schools of thoughts (e.g. Sunni, Shii, Zaydi schools of thoughts and others). The conference wants to offer valuable insights into a wide variety of studies and aims for an increased exchange with other disciplines. Therefore, in addition to studies from the Islamic Intellectual and Theological History, papers from humanities and social sciences as well as historical science are welcomed. Papers from the field of Islamic manuscript studies in various regions and historical periods can also be submitted.

The following research questions shall guide the contributions: What do the concepts of 'canon' and 'censorship' mean in the context of the case study? How did the canon become authoritative? How were contradicting ideas suppressed or censored? What stages did a text or an idea pass through with regard to the reception history to become a canonical text or a constitutional idea? What scholarly community stood behind this development who has fostered and supported a certain text or idea? What other historical, social or political factors favored the dominance of certain texts, ideas or individuals over others?

Organization:

The conference will be organized and the proceedings edited by Mohammad Gharaibeh (Berlin Institute for Islamic Theology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Bacem Dziri (Institute for the Study of Islamic Culture and Religion at the Goethe University of Frankfurt) and Amir Dziri (Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg) in cooperation with the Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG). The conference will take place in Berlin from **October 8th–10th 2021**. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered. If international travelling will not be possible in Oct 2021, the conference will take place virtually. The papers will be peer reviewed and published in a collective volume.

Time Frame:

- Please submit a short academic cv and a proposal by **January 15th, 2021**, including the title of your contribution and an abstract of about 400 words. Please send this via mail to the address below.
- Once the paper has been accepted, you will be asked to participate in one or two preceding workshops in Berlin in which we will discuss the theoretical and methodological framework as well as your papers more detailed. If travelling will not be possible at that time, we will offer an online workshop.
- The first draft of the full article after the conference will be due **January 31st 2022** (7.000–15.000 words)

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